# 5 reasons why sex workers' rights in the EU must be protected

Blog, Civil Rights and Freedom, Safety, Sex Work

> If we want to protect the human rights of sex workers, consensual sex work must be decriminalised. Read why and endorse our letter below

When we talk about consensual sex work, we're talking about adults voluntarily choosing to engage in sex work. This means that they are not being forced or coerced into the work, and are free to leave at any time. They have agency and control over their own bodies, and are able to negotiate the terms and conditions of their work.

To be clear, consensual sex work is not trafficking or exploitation. Trafficking is a serious human rights violation, and an extremely worrying reality across Europe, Central Asia and beyond. Consensual sex work involves a sex worker making a choice about their own livelihood and remaining in control of that choice.

Decriminalisation of consensual sex work is important because it allows for the protection of people engaged in sex work. It allows a safer and more regulated environment where their rights to personal autonomy, privacy and other fundamental rights can be better protected.

Many LGBTI people engage in sex work, some because they want to, some because discrimination and other structural exclusion due to social injustice leave them with little option. The experiences of LGBTI people in the sex work industry can be particularly challenging, due to the intersection of stigma related to both their SOGIESC and their profession. Combatting social injustices, discrimination and stigma is key to all of ILGA-Europe's work; additionally, people need to be protected, regardless of their reasons to engage in sex work.

## What happens when sex work is criminalised?

Research shows that criminalisation of any aspect of sex work has proven to be ineffective. Instead of protecting sex workers, it pushes them further to the edges of our societies in their working and daily lives. For example, in the parts of Europe where sex work is criminalised, sex workers working together are regularly prosecuted for brothel-keeping, even though it's by working together that they can stay safe. Sex workers who have kids risk losing custody of their children, those who are migrants risk losing their residence permits, and all risk homelessness when authorities force landlords to evict them. Instead of protecting sex workers, criminalising policies impede their access to homes, services, safety and justice, while at the same time propelling stigma, violence and discrimination against them.

## 5 reasons why the European Parliament must protect sex workers

Policy makers must listen to the voices of sex workers, including LGBTI sex workers, in the development of policies that affect them. Particularly now, when the members of the European Parliament are discussing the proposal on Violence against women and domestic violence, they must reject any attempts to criminalise any aspects of consensual sex work among adults. Criminalisation is not the solution.

Here are a handful clear and fair reasons for the EU policy makers should ensure protection of rights of sex workers:

**Respect for human rights**

Criminalising consensual sex work is a violation of the human rights of sex workers, including their rights to privacy, security, and freedom from discrimination provided in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU is committed to protecting human rights, and criminalising consensual sex work is contradictory to this principle.

**Gender equality**

The EU is committed to promoting gender equality, while criminalising consensual sex work disproportionately affects women and other marginalised groups, including LGBTI people.

**Public health**

Criminalising consensual sex work can make it more difficult for sex workers to access healthcare and other services, which can put them at greater risk of health problems

**Right to self-determination**

Criminalising consensual sex work is an infringement on the right of sex workers to make decisions about their own bodies and livelihoods.

**negative Effectiveness**

There is a lack of evidence that criminalising consensual sex work is effective in reducing the number of sex workers or in improving their safety. Some studies have shown that criminalisation can actually increase risks of violence for sex workers.

*If you represent a civil society organisation, you can endorse our letter, prepared along with the members of the Coalition on Sex Workers' Rights and Inclusion,* here.